DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 352 305 SO 022 711

AUTHOR Parker, Franklin; Parker, Betty J.
TITLE Educational Historian Lawrence A. Cremin (1925-90) and U.S. Education Direction.
PUB DATE 23 Sep 92
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Biographies; *Educational History; *Educational Research; Educational Theories; Elementary Secondary Education; Historiography
IDENTIFIERS *Cremin (Lawrence A)

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the life and work of Lawrence A. Cremin (1925-1990), an important historian of U.S. education. One of Cremin's most notable works was the 1961 "Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957." Cremin was on the faculty at Teachers College, Columbia University (New York) for 41 years. Appendices provide lists of Cremin's professional accomplishments, his books and reviews of his books, and writings about Cremin. (DB)

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by

Franklin and Betty J. Parker

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September 23, 1992

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Lawrence Arthur Cremin's parents (Arthur T. Cremin and Theresa [Borowick] Cremin) founded and ran the private "New York Schools of Music," where he worked part time. He attended Hunter College Model School (elementary) and Townsend Harris High School, the City College-run public high school for the gifted. Bright and well prepared, he entered City College of New York in 1940 (age 15 1/2), left to serve in the U.S. Army Air Corps, and returned to City College for his B.S. degree in 1946.

Aided by the G.I. Bill, he was a graduate student in U.S. educational history at Teachers College, Columbia University (TCCU). He earned the M.A. (1947) and Ph.D. (1949) degrees under Foundations of Education stalwarts Lyman Bryson, George S. Counts, Harold O. Rugg, John L. Childs, Kenneth Benne, R. Freeman Butts (his doctoral advisor), Bruce Raup (whose daughter Charlotte, a mathematics teacher, he married in 1956), and also studied with Ralph Linton, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict.

Cremin was on the faculty at TCCU for 41 years as instructor, 1949-51; assistant professor, 1951-54; associate professor, 1954-57, professor, 1957-61; and as Frederick A.P. Barnard Professor of Education (with a joint appointment in Columbia's history department), 1961-90.

He was TCCU president, 1974-84, and while at TCCU was president of the Chicago-based Spencer Foundation, 1985-90. He gave eight distinguished lecture series (most later published), wrote 16 books, received 9 honorary degrees, won other awards and honors, and cofounded and was second president (1969-73) of the National Academy of Education.

He had a distinguished career yet will be best remembered and judged by his books. His first six books appeared during the then dominant Monroe-Cubberley style of narrow school history, meant to extol public education and enhance teachers' professional status.

Cremin's first book, the 1951 American Common School: An Historic Conception, his revised doctoral dissertation, presented public schools as helping Americans perpetuate their republican form of government.

His second book, the 1953 History of Education in American Culture, was a textbook coauthored with R. Freeman Butts. His third book, the 1954 History of Teachers College, Columbia University, was coauthored with D.A. Shannon and M.E. Townsend.

His fourth and fifth books, coauthored with Merle L. Borrowman, were the 1955 Public Education and the Future of America and the 1956 Public Schools in Our Democracy.

His sixth book, the 1957 Republic and the School: Horace Mann on the Education of Free Men, was the first of 52 titles he edited in the Teachers College Press Classics in Education series. His seventh book, the 1961 Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957, broke with Monroe-Cubberley historiography, was a key revisionist work, won the 1962 Bancroft Prize in History, and made Cremin a leading historian.

This revisionist movement and Cremin's place in it began in the mid 1950s. Fund for the Advancement of Education-sponsored conferences in 1954-55 found U.S. educational history "shamefully neglected" by professional historians. The Fund's 1957 report, The Role of Education in American History, for American Historical Association members and others, was followed by formation of a Committee on the Role of Education in American History. Through grants the Committee encouraged history department faculty and students to write more thoroughly researched U.S. educational history.

Committee member and grantee Bernard Bailyn, Harvard historian, in his 1960 Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study, criticized as "educational missionaries" Paul Monroe and his student, Ellwood P. Cubberley, who dominated the teaching and writing of history of education in schools of education. In their enthusiasm to evangelize school history in order to inspire teachers with professional pride and zeal, they allegedly neglected social and intellectual history. Bailyn urged historians to correct this distortion and to think of education "not only as formal pedagogy but as the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations."

By including the influence of the family, religion, race relations, apprenticeship training, and the economy, as well as schools, Bailyn underscored the complex socioeconomic and political structure which colonial education served. He urged historians of education to write a more objective educational history.

The progressive education-oriented National Society of College Teachers of Education (NSCTE) sponsored the History of Education Society (HES) and financed its History of Education Journal (started by University of Michigan's Claude Eggertsen). As HES president, 1959-60, NSCTE president, 1961, and member of the Committee on the Role of Education in American history, 1962, Cremin helped transform the HES and had its new History of Education Quarterly published at the University of Pittsburgh, edited by Cremin's former TCCU colleague, Ryland Crary. HES became independent of NSCTE. From 1968 educational historians had another professional outlet in the American Educational Research Association's Division F (History and Historiography of Education).

Cremin had organized a 1964 symposium for the Committee on the Role of Education in American History. His paper, published as the 1965 Wonderful World of Ellwood Patterson Cubberley, traced the origin of the Monroe-Cubberley historiography to the inspirational national education histories of Europe which Henry Barnard had published in his American Journal of Education (1855-82) and in his early Bureau of Education publications (Barnard was

Commissioner, 1867-70). This hagiography continued in centennial (1776-1876) histories of education in various states.

In praising public schools for enhancing U.S. democratic values, Cubberley's popular 1919 Public Education in the United States influenced educators and others for decades. Also, some progressive educators who taught history of education during the 1930s-50s used inspirational educational history to support social reconstructionism, urged by George S. Counts, Harold O. Rugg, and Theodore Brameld.

Making educational history a handmaiden of social reconstructionism further discredited the history of education in the 1950s when conservatives and liberal arts professors blamed public school weaknesses on progressive educators John Dewey, William H. Kilpatrick, and their followers.

This historical setting helps explain the sequence of events: Fund for the Advancement of Education-sponsored conferences that urged a revised educational historiography, Committee grants for new historical research approaches, Bernard Bailyn's 1960 Education in the Forming of American Society as first model, and Cremin's 1961 Transformation of the School as second model which won the 1962 Bancroft Prize in History and popular acclaim. Standards were set for educational historiography to include socio-economic, political, and intellectual history; plus the educational influences of libraries, museums, bookstores, the media, and so on; along with schools.

Educational historian John L. Rury reexamined Transformation of the School 30 years after its publication. He criticized Cremin for neglecting the then available literature on discrimination against blacks, women, and immigrants. Yet, Rury wrote, reading Transformation as an undergraduate had inspired him to become an educational historian.

Similarly, Transformation was the first book Michael B. Katz read in American educational history. Transformation "was exciting," Katz wrote, acknowledging the intellectual debt he owed Cremin. He also praised the Classics in Education series, silently thanking Cremin "every time [he] taught the history of American education." Katz's own 1968 Irony of Early School Reform began the radical revisionist movement in educational history, which largely challenged Cremin's findings.

Transformation remains the most quoted book about the progressive education era, which Cremin called "the educational phase of American Progressivism writ large; a many-sided effort to use the schools to improve the lives of individuals." Rury and others have admired the book for its grace and eloquence.

After the spring 1964 Committee symposium he had organized, Cremin later wrote, "there occurred one of those unexpected events that often gives decisive direction to a person's life and work." Officials of the American Historical Association invited Cremin to write a comprehensive history of American education for the U.S. Office of Education's 1967 centennial. Cremin accepted, thinking that with foundation-aided research he could complete a 3-volume history in 7

years. His American Education trilogy took 23 years and covered 1,775 pages of text, including 240 pages of bibliographic essays.

Before the trilogy, Cremin published his 1965 Genius of American Education, from his Horace Mann Lectures at the University of Pittsburgh that year. The essence of American education, its animating spirit and characteristic quality, he wrote, was its commitment to popularization--a main theme of the trilogy.

Cremin's 1976 Public Education, from his John Dewey Society Lectures of February 1975, along with his 1977 Traditions of American Education, from his University of Wisconsin Merle Curti Lectures of March 1976, summarized the trilogy's ideas and themes to that time.

His 1990 Popular Education and Its Discontents, from his March 1989 Harvard University Inglis and Burton Lectures, was the trilogy's afterthought and his last book.

In the trilogy, Cremin defined education (too encompassing, some thought) as "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, or sensibilities, as well as any learning that results from the effort, direct or indirect, intended or unintended."

The trilogy's first volume, the 1970 Colonial Experience, examined the transfer of educational agencies from Europe to America and showed how Americans refashioned these educational agencies to serve American civic and economic needs. The second volume, the 1980 National Experience, explored two of the trilogy's three themes: popularization, or increasing accessibility to schools and other learning agencies by students of diverse abilities, backgrounds, and ages; and, second, the proliferation of schools and colleges, plus such nonschool educative agencies as newspapers, libraries, clubs, bookstores, and so on.

The third volume, the 1988 Metropolitan Experience, explored the third theme, politicization, or using schools rather than political action alone to solve social problems.

These three themes, Cremin wrote, affected schools for good and ill as the U.S. became metropolitan, a nation of cities exporting its culture to the world. Post World War II education reports were increasingly critical, documented continuing crises, bemoaned mediocrity, and blamed schools' poor performance for America's relative world economic decline.

To the charge of lowered quality, Cremin pointed to the varying standards and missions of the vast U.S. educational enterprise: students in 15,000 school districts administering 59,000 elementary schools and 24,000 secondary schools; in 3,000 institutions of higher learning, a third of them community colleges; and in 21,000 private elementary schools, 8,000 private secondary schools, many private colleges; plus innumerable nonschool agencies.

The genius of American education, he wrote, through popularization and proliferation, created the possibility (nearly achieved) for all to learn and to rise through learning, particularly in cities, which are cornucopias of knowledge agencies. Our schools, wrote Cremin, made us one of the world's most educated people.

The problem of American education, he wrote, lies in our failure to develop different curricula to meet different needs, our inability to design courses of study that serve those on the bottom who fail or drop out, and our not knowing how to reach those who most need encouragement and good teaching.

Asked in an interview why he defined education so broadly, he said: since history should shed light on the present, a broader interpretation helps people see better the educative influence of the vast network of other educative agencies, besides schools.

Asked why he chose popularization, proliferation, and politicization as themes of American education, he said: Americans embraced education as part of their fundamental aspirations; they want and expect schools to be responsive to their many needs.

Asked if he saw the progressive education era differently in 1990 than he did in 1961, he said he felt now that progressive education had left us more divided. When reformers used urban schools as vehicles of reform, they moved schools and education front and center to achieve the good life, but were uncertain what the good life is.

Asked why he had emphasized religion, he said: religious concerns led fundamentalists, after the Scopes trial, to build a vast network of institutions, such as the Moody Bible Institute, many of them now accredited; and to pioneer in the educational use of religious mass publishing, radio, and TV. They thus embraced first education and then political involvement to evangelize, by their lights, for a better moral social order.

Asked why he thought TV had become a mightier educative (and miseducative) force than schools, he said: in the 25 years between 1950-75, families with a TV set rose from 5 percent to 96 percent of the population; adding: we need to understand TV's negative as well as positive effects.

Asked about family decline, he said: the U.S. has fewer family support services than other industrial nations have. Thus, we lost those we most need to reach, especially poor minority children. The New Deal put out-of-work teachers into preschools. The World War II Lanham Act created day care for children of factory-working mothers. This stopped after 1945. We thought mothers would stay home. But they are out there working and their children lack care.

Asked about insufficiently used nonschool educative agencies, he said: learning would improve and more equality result if schools introduced children to, and encouraged parents to help make use of, rich ancillary educative agencies such as libraries and museums.

Asked what he hoped readers would learn from his trilogy, he said: to see better the central role of American education; probe its complexities more wisely; and, beyond improving the economy, beyond meeting children's needs, to find better ways through education to help build the good society.

Cremin died suddenly of a heart attack on September 4, 1990, one month short of his sixty-fifth birthday.

Some who spoke at his memorial services and admired his musical and other abilities, besides his teaching, administration, educational history, and writing skills--called him a Renaissance man.

Appendices

Cremin as Editorial Advisory Board Member:
American Journal of Education
American Scholar
Education Research and Perspectives (Australia)
History of Education (England)
History of Education Journal
International Review of Education
Journal of Family History
Sociology of Education
Teachers College Record (Cremin was associate editor, 1952-59)

Institutions Where Cremin Was a Guest Professor:
Bank Street College of Education
Harvard University, 1957, 1961
Seminar in American Studies at Salzburg, Austria, 1956
Stanford University, 1973
University of California, Los Angeles, 1956
University of Wisconsin

Cremin as Board of Trustees Member:
Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences
Charles F. Kettering Foundation
Children's Television Workshop
John and Mary Markle Foundation
John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation
Rockefeller Archive Center
Spencer Foundation
World Book Yearbook
Year Book of Education (jointly published by TCCU and University of London)

Cremin as Distinguished Lecturer:
Horace Mann Lecturer, University of Pittsburgh, 1965
Sir John Adams Memorial Lecturer, University of London, 1966
Cecil H. Green Visiting Professor, University of British Columbia, 1972
Merle Curti Lecturer, University of Wisconsin, 1976
Sir John Adams Memorial Lecturer, University of California, Los Angeles, 1976
Vera Brown Memorial Lecturer, National Institute of Education, 1978
Distinguished Visiting Lecturer, Simon Fraser University, 1982
Irving R. Melbo Visiting Professor, University of Southern California, 1982

Cremin as Professional Organizations Member (and Offices Held)
President, History of Education, 1959
President, National Society of College Teachers of Education, 1961
President, National Academy of Education, 1969-73 (founding member in 1965)
American Philosophical Society
American Academy of Arts and Sciences
American Antiquarian Society
Society of American Historians
Council on Foreign Relations

Other Offices Cremin Held:
Chair, Curriculum Improvement Panel, U.S. Office of Education, 1963-65
Chair, Regional Laboratories Panel, U.S. Office of Education, 1965-66
Chair , Carnegie Commission on the Education of Educators, 1966-70
Vice Chair, White House Conference on Education, 1965

Cremin's International Travel:
Head of delegation of American educators to People's Republic of China, summer 1978
Lectured extensively in England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Austria, Israel, and Sweden

Cremin's Fellowships and Awards:
Phi Beta Kappa
Guggenheim Fellowship, 1957-58, for research in history of American education
Pulitzer Prize in History, 1981
Bancroft Prize in History, 1962
Fellow, Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, 1964-65; Visiting Scholar, 1971-72
American Educational Research Association's Award for Distinguished Contributions to Educational Research, 1969
New York University's Award for Creative Educational Leadership, 1971
Columbia University's Butler Medal in Silver, 1972
College of the City of New York's Townsend Harris Medal, 1974
New York Academy of Public Education's Medal for Distinguished Service to Public Education, 1982
Hunter College's President's Medal, 1984
Carnegie Corporation of New York Medal, 1988

Cremin's Honorary Degrees:
City University of New York
Litt.D., Columbia University, 1975
L.H.D., Ohio State University, 1975
LL.D., University of Bridgeport, 1975
LL.D., University of Rochester, 1980
L.H.D., Kalamazoo College, 1976
Litt.D., Rider College, 1979
LL.D., Miami University, 1983
Suffolk University
L.H.D., Widener University, 1983
College of William and Mary
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Northern Illinois University
State University of New York
L.H.D., George Washington University, 1985

Cremin's Administrative Positions:
Director, Division of Philosophy, Social Sciences, and Education, TCCU, 1958-74
Director, Institute of Philosophy and Politics of Education, TCCU, 1965-74
President, TCCU, 1974-84
President, Spencer Foundation, Chicago, 1985-90

Cremin's Books and Reviews of His Books

1951: **The American Common School: An Historic Conception.** New York: Teachers College Press.
1953: (With R. Freeman Butts). **A History of Education in American Culture.** New York: Holt.
1954: (With D. A. Shannon and M.E. Townsend). **A History of Teachers College, Columbia University.** New York: Columbia University Press.
1955: **Public Education and the Future of America.** Washington, DC: National Education Association.

1956: (With Merle L. Borrowman). **Public Schools in Our Democracy**. New York: Macmillan.

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Marland, Sidney P. Chicago Sunday Tribune (August 13, 1961), p. 5.

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Weiss, Robert M. History of Education Quarterly, Vol. 2, No. 2 (June 1962), pp. 130-132.

1965: The Genius of American Education. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Teachers College Record, Vol. 68 (January 1967), p. 341.

1965: The Wonderful World of Ellwood Patterson Cubberley: An Essay in the Historiography of American Education. New York: Teachers College Press.

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Tyack, David. Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Spring 1966), pp. 202-205.

Journal of American History, Vol. 52 (December 1965), p. 678.

Teachers College Record, Vol. 67 (December 1965), p. 230.

1969: (With Lee J. Cronbach, Patrick Suppes, et al.). **Research for Tomorrow's Schools: Disciplined Inquiry for Education**. New York: Macmillan.

1970: American Education, The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783. New York: Harper and Row.

American Scholar, Vol. 60 (Winter 1991), p. 128.

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